

It's time to bring Bozeman Creek out of hiding

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Guest columnists

Imagine Bozeman Creek flowing through downtown as a clean blue-green corridor that draws people to the water. Friends gather along the creek, visitors explore downtown businesses, and residents connect to the “Main Street to the Mountains” trail system.

At the center is a healthy creek, an authentic feature and defining signature of our city.

That vision may still be some distance away, but a planning effort is underway to help make it possible. The goal is to daylight Bozeman Creek, improve its ecological health, expand public access, and strengthen the community's connection to this vital resource while supporting downtown vitality.

Bozeman Creek is more than an overlooked channel. It is the city's largest source of surface water and an essential artery for our community, supplying drinking water, supporting irrigation and sanitation systems, and contributing to fire protection.

The steady flow we rely on can also create risk. During heavy rain or rapid snowmelt, the systems that carry the creek through the city could be overwhelmed, potentially affecting downtown and nearby neighborhoods. Reducing that risk is an important part of this effort.

Important groundwork already exists. FEMA floodplain maps and previous studies provide tools to explore improvements that could make the creek safer, cleaner, and more accessible.

This effort, the Bozeman Creek Vision Plan, is both a design project and a community conversation. City staff, volunteer experts, and consultants with experience in similar projects are helping the community explore possibilities and shape a shared vision for the creek's future.

Public engagement has already begun. Early stakeholder meetings included neighborhood representatives, downtown businesses, water scientists, ecologists, designers, and community advocates.

The goal of these conversations is simple: To listen.

Over the next six months, additional meetings, presentations, and public forums will invite residents to help shape the ideas under consideration.

Planning requires balancing aspiration with practical realities. There can be tension between bold ideas and preserving the status quo. The team's role is to explore what is possible while acknowledging financial, environmental, and logistical constraints.

Community trust is central to the process. As one participant noted, "we will move at the speed of trust." Turning priorities into results requires thoughtful engagement and public confidence.

That spirit is already visible in the partnership between the City of Bozeman and SeeBozemanCreek, a coalition of citizens working since 2019 to improve the creek's future. Volunteers, including artists, designers, engineers, scientists, and advocates, have contributed their time and expertise to turn a long-standing challenge into an opportunity.

We do not claim to have all the answers. What we can do is keep advancing the conversation and inviting others to participate. Like the waterway itself, the vision for Bozeman Creek will evolve through

collaboration and community insight. For years, residents have been listening to one another and to the creek itself. Hidden as it passes through downtown, Bozeman Creek is ready to be rediscovered.

Now is the time to tap the community's wisdom. Residents, business owners, property owners, and civic leaders all have a role to play in shaping the future of Bozeman Creek, our creek.

Learn how you can be a part of Bozeman Creek's Vision Plan and subscribe to project updates from the City of Bozeman at engage.bozeman.net/bzncreek

Steve Nobel and **Jim Madden** are residents of Bozeman and artists who met through Mountain Time Arts. One of those projects sought to draw attention to Bozeman Creek, and culminated in 2023 and 2025 with public art over the creek at City Hall. They are co-leaders of SeeBozeman-Creek.

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